

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15

CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06

PRS-01 DHA-02 ORM-02 /069 W

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R 121227Z JUL 77

FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0207

INFO AMEMBASSY DARESSALAAM

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

USMISSION GENEVA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SREF, BC, ZA

SUBJECT: RAND DAILY MAIL ARTICLES ON "TERRORIST AIRFLIGHTS"

1. SUMMARY FRONT PAGE "EXPOSE" IN JULY 7 JOHANNESBURG RAND DAILY MAIL HEADLINED "TERRORIST AIRLIFTS" REPORTS HOW RHODESIAN REFUGEES ENTERING BOTSWANA ARE FLOWN TO ZAMBIA FOR MILITARY TRAINING. OPERATION DUBBED A "TERROR PIPELINE". "EXPOSE" CONTINUED IN FRONT-PAGE HEADLINE ARTICLES OF JULY 8 AND 9. END SUMMARY.

2. THE JULY 7 ARTICLE, WHICH INCLUDES INTERVIEWS WITH ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY TIBONE AND OTHER GOB OFFICIALS, IS GENERALLY FACTUAL AND DOES NOT ADD TO PREVIOUS REPORTING FROM THIS POST. HOWEVER, ACCOUNT HOMES IN ON FOLLOWING POINT: CHARTER FLIGHTS ARE TAKING PLACE ON "MYSTERY" SOUTH AFRICAN AIRCRAFT, MAINTAINED AT JAN SMUTS AIRPORT, AND MANNED
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PARTLY BY SOUTH AFRICAN RESIDENT CREW WITH FOREIGN PASSPORTS.

3. IN FOLLOW-UP, JULY 8 RAND DAILY MAIL REPORTED UNDER FRONT-PAGE HEADLINE OF "TERROR AIRLIFT", THAT ANONYMOUS THREATS TO BLOW UP THE PLANES AND OFFICES OF AIR BOTSWANA FOLLOWED IN THE WAKE OF THE JULY 7 STORY. THE

ARTICLE STATED THAT THE VISCOUNT AIRCRAFT IN QUESTION WAS REGISTERED IN BOTSWANA BUT OWNED BY "SOUTH AFRICAN INTERESTS".

4. JULY 9 FRONT-PAGE ARTICLE CHARGES THAT THE "CONTROL-VERSIAL PLANE, WHICH HAS CAUSED A STORM OF ANGRY REACTION THROUGHOUT SOUTH AFRICA" WAS "KEPT IN THE AIR" BY WHITE RHODESIANS, WHO OPERATE IT, PROVIDE REPAIRS AND HAVE NO OBJECTION TO THE AIRLIFT OPERATION.

5. COMMENT: DESPITE SENSATIONAL ASPECTS, INITIAL ARTICLE OF JULY 7TH SEEMS FACTUAL AND EVEN SYMPATHETIC TO BOTSWANA IN ITS STRUGGLE TO HANDLE REFUGEE FLOODS. SMELLING BLOOD, HOWEVER, THE MAIL SUBSEQUENTLY REDOUBLED ITS ATTENTIONS ON THE QUESTION OF THE IDENTITY OF THE "MYSTERY" PLANE'S OWNERS AND OPERATORS. OBVIOUSLY, THIS TYPE OF PUBLICITY, WITH ITS ACCENT ON TERRORISM AND ON POSSIBLE SOUTH AFRICAN AND RHODESIAN COMPLICITY, COULD PRODUCE "SCANDAL" IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. WHILE STORY IS TREATED HERE WITH ILL-CONCEALED CONTEMPT AS ILLUSTRATING VAGARIES OF S.A. PRESS, WE WOULD NOT EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY OF BACKLASH AMONG SOME EUROPEAN DONORS WHO HAVE BEEN CONTRIBUTING REGULARLY TO THE EASING OF REFUGEE PROBLEMS IN BOTSWANA.
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